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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 RANGOON 000380

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STATE FOR EAP/BCLTV; PACOM FOR FPA

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SUBJECT: NATIONAL CONVENTION RECESSES FOR BURMESE NEW YEAR

REF: RANGOON 201

Classified By: COM Carmen Martinez for Reasons 1.4 (b,d)

1. (C) Summary: The National Convention is scheduled to recess on March 31. Some ethnic cease-fire group delegates have already departed to "come clean" with their unregistered vehicles by the March 31 deadline. This session "discussed" nearly half of the agenda items. Some cease-fire groups are reportedly unhappy with the process and have submitted recommendations to the chair. The GOB had some sharp words for dissenters as the current session of the National Convention ended. The next NC session is projected to resume in May. End Summary.

2. (C) Reports from delegates attending the National Convention (NC) indicate that the current session will recess on March 31, enabling the delegates to return home before Burmese New Year in mid-April. The conveners have reportedly ordered the delegates to depart the venue by April 1, at the latest. Some ethnic cease-fire group (CFG) delegates reportedly were permitted to leave the convention site on March 25 in order to return home to turn in their unregistered vehicles by the March 31 deadline set up by the GOB. (Note: Many CFGs operate unregistered vehicles that were smuggled into Burma from Thailand or China. End Note.) Although no official statements have been issued on when the NC will resume, some delegates are projecting that they will be called back in early May.

3. (C) About half of the 15 agenda items were completed during this 6-week session of the NC. Unlike the previous session (May 17 - July 9, 2004), this time the NC chair, secretary, and other officials lodged at the venue to try to

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quickly clear up misunderstandings and to speed up the process. Some delegates optimistically believe that the remaining eight items can be "discussed" within a month, that the next session will be the last, and they can all return home for good before the monsoon starts up in June.

4. (C) Reaction to the current NC session by the delegates is mixed. One government delegate crowed that it was "a holiday" because all the papers were prepared in advance and there was no work for the delegates to do. However, one ethnic CFG delegate complained that "nobody is free to express different opinions and the NC is of no use."

5. (C) Some of the CFG delegates are reportedly disaffected with the NC process because their suggestions and requests made to the conveners did not receive responses. They have been arguing for parallel, autonomous administrative and judiciary systems in their Special Autonomous Regions, an idea that the United Wa State Army (UWSA) first proposed in the earlier session. (Note: Only about half of the 109 "Other Invited Guests" from the ethnic CFGs attended the NC, reportedly downsizing their delegations for "security reasons" (reftel). End Note.)

6. (C) According to a credible report, in response to the CFGs' written proposal for separate administration and judiciary, Major General Khin Aung Myint, a member of the NC Commission and the Director of Psychological Warfare of the Ministry of Defense, summoned the delegates from six major ethnic CFGs to a meeting on March 29. He crudely scolded them like a group of naughty schoolboys and demanded to know who was behind the document. He told them that "all your activities have been noted down and attempts to change the course of the NC are to no avail," and the NC will not accept their suggestions. He warned them to "shut up" if they were interested in maintaining their organizations and businesses in the future. He further stated that after the NC is over they must all surrender their weapons.

7. (C) Comment: The GOB appears determined to push through its version of "disciplined democracy" regardless of internal or external opinion. At the same time the CFGs, although they are uncomfortable with the process, do not appear to be prepared to take a stand and call the NC the farce that it is. The GOB has succeeded in dividing the ethnic CFGs and distracting them by offering them continued business incentives. All that remains is for the GOB to emasculate the CFGs militarily and politically by disarming and

dismantling them. It is unclear how the CFGs would react to that end-game scenario. End Comment.  
Martinez